

# US envoy keen to attract investors to Kingdom

Families of navy personnel to return to Bahrain soon

# DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS

Adam Ereli, the Ambassador of the United States to Bahrain, has conceded the balance of trade has been largely in favour of the US since the FTA came into force in 2006.

This trade regime, he insisted, has however made the Kingdom attractive to several American multi-national corporations. He cited the example of Kraft, Ernst and Young, West Point Homes and Occidental Petroleum, which have set up operations in Bahrain. Trade, he said, has grown over 20 per cent every year since the FTA was signed and is now valued at 1.37 billion US dollars, up from \$782 million in 2006. There is a need, he said, to educate companies in the Kingdom on how to make use of the FTA.

The ambassador made these observations during the course of a free wheeling conversation with journalists yesterday on a wide range of issues.

Ereli said relations with Bahrain are very strong, and that recent visits by both the heads of state as well as other senior dignitaries have provided ample evidence of the importance given to this relationship.

With regard to his efforts during his tenure in the Kingdom, Ereli expressed hope that a few more "gold key" investors could make the Kingdom their regional headquarters.

He said, "I would like these companies to make Bahrain their regional headquarters and it will help generate a lot of jobs. It will show the world that the Kingdom matters."

President Obama, Ereli went on to say, will soon take a decision to reverse an earlier order to withdraw navy families from the Kingdom. This will mean the children of personnel will be back in the Kingdom. This decision, the ambassador said, underscored the confidence in the



**BOOSTING TIES:** Ambassador of the United States to Bahrain, Adam Ereli

PICTURE BY BIJU HARIDAS

overall security situation in the Kingdom.

The ambassador added that Bahrain's advice is valued, even more so at a time when the US is changing its tact while dealing with the Muslim and Arab world.

The US, he said, is committed to helping Bahrain develop a strong and healthy society. There are several aspects to this relationship, Ereli added.

The security partnership is very strong and next week will see the berthing of the US aircraft carrier USS Eisenhower in the waters of the Kingdom.

The Kingdom's navy displayed its prowess while leading a multitrack force recently and was involved in another force set up to tackle the menace of drug smuggling in the region, the top diplomat added.

There has also been an upgrade in the infrastructure in the Kingdom and the US is also involved in activities with less tangible gains like improving the intellectual atmosphere.

Training is also being provided to teachers and scholarships given to students. "We have sent over 100 students on various courses to America," Ereli said.

It also emerged that assistance is being provided to the Kingdom in its fight against human trafficking.

In the next two years, the ambassador said there will be greater engagement with the countries of the region.

Regarding Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's interest in the improvement of women's affairs, the ambassador said that this is an area which will be greatly emphasised over the next couple of years. Support, he said, will also continue for the initiatives of the Crown Prince Shaikh Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa.

In short, he said his country will help the youth of the Kingdom realise their potential.

Asked to comment on the case of corruption in Alba that is being heard in an

American court, he said investigations are being conducted.

Speaking about relations with countries in the region, as well as the Arab world, Ereli said: "The first hundred days of this (Obama) presidency has set the course. We realised the old approach was not working and this can be gauged by our willingness to talk to countries like Iran and Syria."

America, he said, is aware of the concerns of the countries in the region vis-a-vis Iran. The ambassador said: "We need the advice of our friends in the region. Bahrain can play a role in this process. The actions of the Iranians can result in everyone in the region seeking nuclear weapons. It is better everybody talks and works at smoothening out the irritants. As we move ahead with Iran, we will consult with our allies in the region. We are not against Iran seeking nuclear energy for peaceful purposes. We are talking to the Russians, Chinese and other parties to make them understand their earlier stance was not helpful for peace in the region."

The economy of Iran, he said, is not in good shape and needed investment. The ambassador said: "We are trying to encourage them to take a new path."

Speaking about Iraq, Ereli said there is much to be done. The infrastructure is in a mess and despite estimates that its oil fields could generate more oil than Saudi Arabia, it would need an investment of \$50 billion to set it right.

Finally, to underscore the importance of the Kingdom in America's larger interests in the region, he said plans were afoot to acquire or rent new property in Juffair for certain naval facilities to be set up shortly. This he said would add value to the economy of the Kingdom given that at present approximately \$200 million is being pumped into the economy by various personnel stationed here.